

Flathead Lake Cherry Growers Association Warehouse
20 North Main Street
Kalispell
Flathead County
Montana

HAER
MONT
15-KALSP,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Flathead Lake Cherry Growers Warehouse

HAER No. MT-6

HAER

MONT,

15-KALSP,

1-

Location: 20 North Main Street
Kalispell, Flathead County, Montana

UTM: Zone 11 Easting 699575 Northing 5431 780
Quad: Kalispell

Dates of Construction: 1935 Original warehouse built
1947 102 x 84-foot addition
1954 Westside extension

Present Owners: Flathead Cherry Growers
20 N. Main Street
Kalispell, Montana 59901

Present Use: Cherry processing and shipping 2 to 3 weeks each
summer. Closed remainder of year. Will be removed in
the fall of 1984 to permit project start-up of the
Urban Development Action Grant for the Kalispell
Center Mall.

Significance: The cherry warehouse represents a business enterprise
which has grown into a healthy enterprise supplying
cherries to a regional market. The Flathead Lake
perimeter has provided the climate and environs for
local cherry orchards while the warehouse has provided
a primary distribution center for the product since
World War II.

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Kalispell, Montana 59901

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The Warehouse was constructed in 1935 by the Great Northern Railroad and leased to the Flathead Lake Cherry Growers Cooperative. A 1935 freeze-out set the Flathead cherry industry back for a few years, but by the mid-1940s, the Kalispell packing plant was the main processing and shipping point for this growing industry. Research indicates that the Kalispell warehouse is the oldest, largest, and most important extant structure associated with the Flathead cherry industry.

Located on the railroad right-of-way in Kalispell, Montana, the Flathead Lake Cherry Growers' warehouse testifies to the fact that, by the 1930s, Kalispell had become the major distribution center and shipping point for the Flathead Valley. Heavy timber construction and equipment for the cherry brining process (the first step in the creation of maraschino cherries) demonstrates the use of available technologies in construction and operation.

First, the cherry industry, in a distinctive way, is an extremely important, visible industry in Montana, especially in Western Montana. The cherry industry in Montana got off to a somewhat inauspicious start. Sweet cherries first appeared in Montana orchards in 1906. Attempts to promote cherry orchard planting by State Agricultural Experiment Station in Corvallis during the first decade of the century met with little success, as the Bitterroot Valley did not have the climate consistently suited for cherry production.

The land immediately fronting on the northwest, north and east sides of the Flathead Lake was significantly better suited. And by 1910, both as part of a promotional campaign to portray the climate in northwestern Montana as temperate and because it was true, the Great Northern Railway was advertising settlement of that area on the basis of its fruit-growing possibilities. By 1920, the commercial cherry-production industry had gained significant footing in the state in that area. From that time until the present, the industry has represented a small, specialized, but economically important industry for the Kalispell/Flathead Lake region.

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By the 1940s, the Flathead Lake area had become the fourth largest sweet-cherry producing area in the United States. In 1944, 15 railroad cars of cherries were shipped from Kalispell; in 1949, 100 cars of cherries were shipped out. Due to the late season ripening of the Flathead cherries, the area's cherry growers have always enjoyed a market advantage, as there exists virtually no competition in the sale of fresh cherries by late July and early August. Approximately 90% of the Flathead cherries are marketed fresh, while the remaining 10% undergo the binging process, for preservation as maraschino cherries. Historically, a very large portion were shipped east to Chicago in refrigerated railway cars; refrigerated trucks now carry the cherries to both coasts. Within the immediate area, the cherry industry adds significantly to the attractiveness of that vicinity for regional travelers during each cherry harvest. Roadside stands are a tradition in many family orchards. The 24-hour-a-day sorting, washing, and packing of the cherries at the warehouse has provided summer employment for at least 60 to 100 people, many of them high school or college students who counted on that for tuition, teachers and married women whose families planned on that additional money each year to supplement other seasonal or varying occupational income, such as from lumbering. The Kalispell Chamber of Commerce, even without the partnership of Great Northern, has used the sweet-cherry industry in tourist promotion and in marketing the area to industry.

The cherry warehouse and packing shed were completed in Kalispell in 1935, the same year in which the Flathead Lake Cherry Growers' Cooperative was founded. The Great Northern Railway financed the construction of the warehouse building along the railroad's right-of-way in Kalispell. Over time, the Flathead Lake Cherry Growers' Cooperative purchased controlling interest in the building. The Growers' Cooperative assessed each member $1/2 - 3/4$ ¢ per pound of cherries packed at the warehouse to meet the coop's lease and operating expenses. An abnormally cold winter in 1935 caused extensive damage to the orchards along the lakeshore, setting the entire industry back a number of years, until newly planted slips came into production. Concentrated use of the warehouse for

sorting, cleaning, shipping, and brining reappeared with the resurgence of the industry in the mid-to late 1940s.

Most cherries are grown in small, family orchards. (In recognition of the nature of the industry, Montana tax law is written to permit the owner of a 10-acre cherry orchard to be taxed for farm land rather than for suburban acreage.) Families often both market some cherries at roadside stands and crate and ship the rest by truck, which--during harvest--makes a run each day through the cherry-growing portions of the Flathead lakeshore. The truck delivers those cherries to the warehouse for processing prior to shipment. One other collection point in Polson has been established for cherries, since the construction of the Kalispell warehouse, but it neither does the volume of processing nor performs the range of functions handled by the Kalispell warehouse. The Kalispell warehouse is also the place to which Kalispell and area families have counted on going for culls and marketable cherries at extremely low prices.

Flathead Lake Cherry Growers' warehouse has been expanded, renovated, and updated since its construction. Major building improvements occurred in 1947 when the north addition and an additional loading dock were likely built. In 1957, an extension was added to the west side of the building to house the brining plant and internal improvements were made to increase packing efficiency. The original configuration and nature of the building remain clearly visible. The improvements have not changed the exterior of the building, by which the majority of Kalispell identify the property and its functions. Despite the timing and amount of change, the building continues to retain primary integrity of construction, materials and warehouse design. In summary, the Cherry Grower's Warehouse represents an exceptional association with and illustration of an industry that has made a significant contribution to the economy and character of the Flathead Lake region.

SUMMARY

Research sources available on the Flathead Lake Cherry Growers' Warehouse

1935

- April 19 Kalispell Daily Interlake, Report of planning for First Annual Cherry Blossom Festival, includes description of community and organizational involvement.
- April 25 Flathead Monitor, p. 1, Report of negotiations between Flathead area cherry growers, Great Northern representatives, and northwest area fruit growers for warehouse plans and treatment of the cherry crop.
- May 6 Great Northern Lease committee report on plans for construction of the Kalispell cherry warehouse. From Great Northern records, Minnesota Historical Society.
- May 9 Kalispell Daily Interlake, Report on Northern Pacific agricultural official in Kalispell and Polson to determine which share of fruit and agricultural market they could serve.
- May 14 (sic 1934 on masthead) Kalispell Daily Interlake, p. 1, Announcement of Great Northerns' decision to build a warehouse to handle the cherry crop and Chamber of Commerce reaction to announcement.
- May 16 Flathead Monitor, p. 1, Report and lengthier explanation of Great Northern's decision to build a cherry warehouse.
- May 20 Kalispell Daily Interlake, pages 1, 2, and 8, Summary of First Annual Cherry Blossom Festival, summary of speeches on importance of industry to the area and of planned warehouse to the industry; editorial on the same subject.
- May 30 Flathead Monitor, p. 1, Report of construction begun on the warehouse and push for completion.
- June 6 Kalispell Times, "A group of Northern Pacific freight officials were in Polson last week making arrangement for capturing the valley fruit crop. They expect to establish a packing plant in Polson and operate iced trucks to Missoula."

1935

- July 11 Flathead Monitor, p. 1, Description of use of new cherry warehouse for the season, including disuse of the Somers warehouse.
- July 15 Kalispell Times, "The Cherry Growers' dance in the new packing house was enjoyed by at least 500 couples Saturday night. On Monday, the packing crews were ready to commence operations on the sweet cherry crop."
- July 20 Kalispell Daily Interlake, Advertisement of dance that night in the cherry warehouse to open it.
- July 26 Kalispell Daily Interlake, p. 1, Report of first use of cherry warehouse for packing and of cherry promotion by the Growers, Great Northern, and Farm Credit Administration.
- August 3 Kalispell Times, p. 1, Report of first use of cherry warehouse by Flathead Lake Cherry Growers, Inc.
- August 15 Flathead Monitor, p. 1 and p. 2, Summary of Cherry season, packing, sales, and political promotion.

1941

- February 11
May 11 Great Northern internal correspondence on plan for transferring ownership of the Kalispell cherry warehouse to the Flathead Lake Cherry Growers' Association, indicates use of the warehouse by them since 1936. Great Northern files, Minnesota Historical Society.
- July 31 Flathead Monitor, p. 1, Summary of 1941 cherry crop, history of the industry in light of warehouse construction and freeze during the winter of 1935-1936.

1942

- July 30 Flathead Monitor, p. 1, Description of 1942 cherry crop and its packing and shipping from the warehouse.

REFERENCES

Interviews:

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November 25, 1982	Les Kjos, Kalispell (755-1925)
November 26, 1982	Ray Robbins, Kalispell (257-2089)
December 2, 1982	Michael Ober, Kalispell (755-5300)

Minnesota Historical Society Archives: Great Northern Railway Manuscript Collection

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Kalispell, 1962 (update of 1927 map)

Kalispell Polk City Directories: 1925-1956

Newspapers:

The Interlake; Kalispell, Sunday, February 27, 1955, p. c 7

The Interlake; Kalispell, Sunday, April 23, 1961, p. c 5

Kalispell News; supplement, May 27, 1948

Flathead Lake Arts and Food, Flathead Lake Branch of Montana Institute of Arts, O'Neil Printers, June 1950

"Land of the Sweet Cherry Orchard" by Maude Larson